

Cutting Costs

Training Cops

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FRANKFORT — A state prison facility will soon close its doors to inmates and be repurposed for use as a Kentucky State Police training facility, saving Kentucky millions and providing desperately-needed space for the state’s troopers to train, Gov. Steve Beshear announced.

“Earlier today, I attended a ceremony at the Kentucky Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation on Eastern Kentucky University’s campus,” Beshear said during a press conference about the move. “Seeing the 485 names on that monument reiterates for me the importance of giving our officers the very best training and training facility that we can provide. There is no doubt that the plan we’re unveiling today has many benefits. And it’s indicative of the innovation and synergy we have seen from this cabinet since the very beginning of this administration.”

The Frankfort Career Development Center, a 205-bed, minimum-security prison sits on 362 acres of land ready almost immediately for the state police to take up residence, Beshear said. The complex already has in place dormitory-style living quarters, a kitchen designed to feed more than 200, laundry facilities, meeting rooms, classroom space and exercise areas.

After a variety of legislative measures designed to reduce the state’s prison population — including most recently House Bill 463 — Department of Corrections Commissioner LaDonna Thompson said it came to her attention that the state no longer needed the prison. The operating budget for FCDC annually costs the state roughly \$3.4 million to operate, Beshear said.

“We sat and looked at some photographs and we talked about some concepts,” said Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary J. Michael Brown of the considerations made to retrofit the prison. “[Gov. Beshear] gave me the go ahead to flesh it out and see if it could really work. We found that all the things which have posed barriers to an academy before, we didn’t have to worry about in this situation.”

Early estimates indicate repurposing the facility for KSP training will save taxpayers \$575,000 annually, the governor announced. But more importantly, retrofitting the prison will keep the state from spending the \$34.7 million it has budgeted for years in its capital outlay plan to construct a new facility for the agency.

“It hasn’t been easy,” Beshear said. “Government-wide, as we all know, we have cut more than \$1 billion in spending while

balancing the budget nine times in the last three and a half years. We are stretched thin everywhere. But I have made it clear that our state police is one of my priorities. Despite our efforts, however, KSP is at its lowest strength in 30 years, simply because recruit classes haven’t kept pace with retirements.”

The facility the agency has called home for 30 years has hindered recruiting opportunities, Brewer said. The Frankfort headquarters currently houses Brewer’s office as well as offices of command staff and 11 administrative branches. The 44-year-old, 56,000 square foot facility only has enough space for 95 cadets at any given time.

“Today, the way we are structured at KSP, we cannot run a cadet class and an inservice class simultaneously,” Brewer said. “So for 23 weeks out of the year, we’re down. [Because of] mandatory [Peace Officer Professional Standards] training, that means we have to go off site. We’re really piecemealing. That’s the immediate benefit right now, is that we could conceivably run a cadet class and inservice class or classes at the same time.”

Last year, Brewer said the agency also spent more than \$22,000 on alternate locations for off-site training, an expense that no longer will be necessary. Additionally, Brewer said he anticipates the new facility providing training opportunities for other law enforcement agencies.

“It’s not many days that you get a 362-acre complex deeded over to you,” Brewer said. “To say we’re in dire need of a training facility is an understatement. We are extremely, extremely excited about it. I can tell you I have been a part of the state police since 1979 and I don’t know of a bigger initiative that I have been involved in, or anything more important to our agency during my tenure.”

REVERSING A STUBBORN PROBLEM

The inmates currently housed at FCDC are non-violent, non-sexual offenders who are nearing the end of their sentences, said Department of Corrections Commissioner LaDonna Thompson. Beshear assured the

public that none of the offenders were being granted early release or shortened sentences. Instead, the inmates will be absorbed into other facilities, such as county jails or halfway houses. All prison employees will be offered transfers to other nearby corrections facilities, he said.

The state’s prison population has been one of Kentucky’s most stubborn problems, Beshear said.

“Thanks to strategic efforts and initiatives over the past three and a half years, we have reversed Kentucky’s inmate population trend, going from first in the nation in the rate of our felon population growth to a sustained drop in population of more than 1,600 inmates,” Beshear said.

Over the course of the next several budget cycles, Brewer said a few projects will have to be undertaken to complete the facility, including but not limited to the construction of a firing range and driving track. While the costs still are being evaluated, Beshear estimated they would fall below \$4 million.

“This is a great opportunity to bolster training opportunities for the Kentucky State Police,” said Department of Criminal Justice Training Commissioner John Bizzack. “This facility will undeniably benefit the Kentucky State Police’s continuing efforts to meet or exceed the state’s legislatively-mandated high standards for its law enforcement community.”

Brown praised the collaboration between Brewer, Thompson and the governor, citing that the move is unconventional, but an exceptional use of resources in tight financial times.

“The best ideas that anyone can have are only as good as those who will listen and those who have enough nerve to act on them,” Brown said. “Many times in government you see situations where people will come up with an idea and it seems to die because it’s never been tried before. A few months ago I came to the governor with an idea that we have no model for. Because I know of no other situation where you take one step and close a prison and the next step you open up a law enforcement facility.”

After Thompson approached Brown with the option of closing the prison, he said he began fleshing out the idea of retrofitting the facility for KSP after considering several other options. It seemed an unreasonable waste to “moth ball” it, leaving an accredited facility to dilapidate. Converting it to a medium-security facility would have cost millions.

“It will certainly save money, it will certainly take at least some \$30 million out of the capital plan, it will provide a state of the art training facility, it will result in no loss of job and no loss of services,” Brown said. “To me, this is what we do. We protect the public and we manage our resources in the most effective way possible.”

▼ Gov. Steve Beshear, left, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary J. Michael Brown, Department of Corrections Commissioner LaDonna Thompson and Kentucky State Police Commissioner Rodney Brewer inform the public of cost-saving measures that will lead to a new KSP training facility.



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH THOMAS

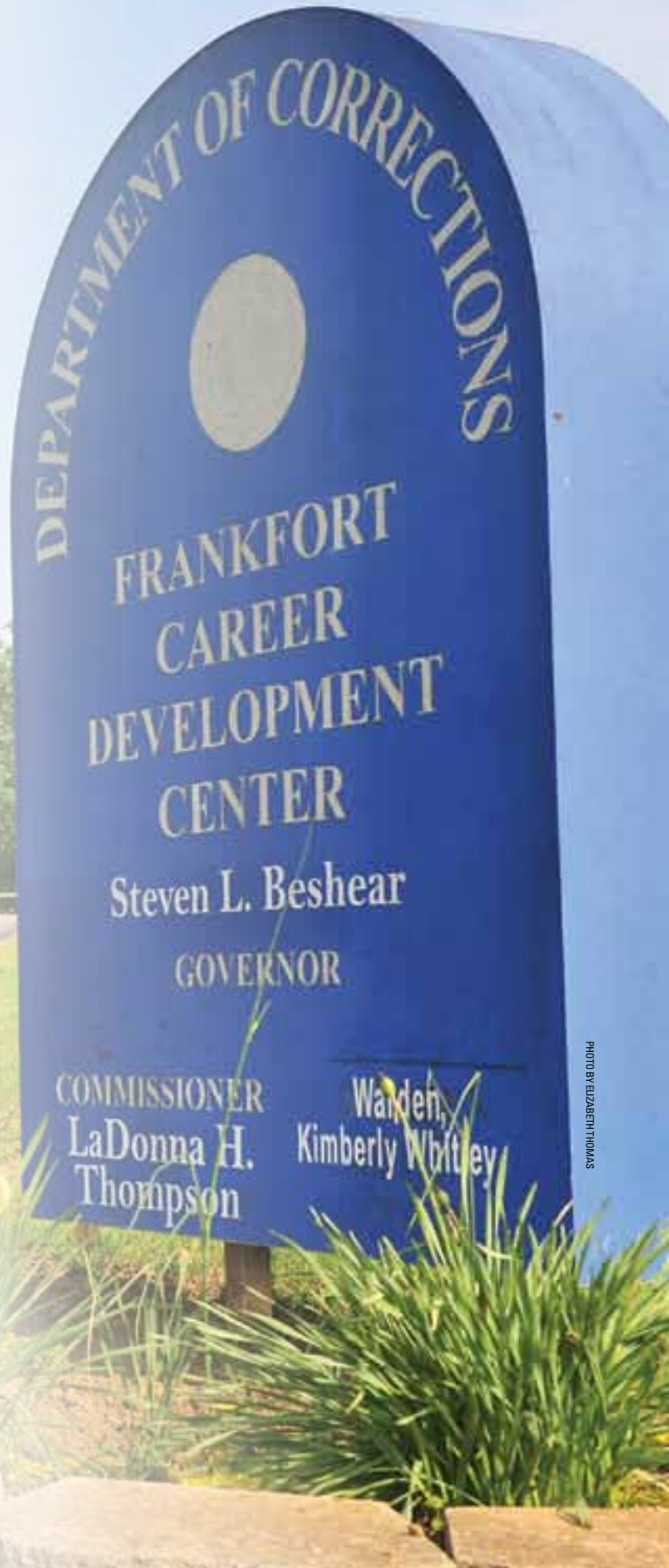


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